

VZCZCXRO0735  
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHMO #0543/01 0641401  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 051401Z MAR 09  
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2251  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHXD/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 000543

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/05/2019

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [RS](#) [MD](#)

SUBJECT: GOR TRANSNISTRIA NEGOTIATOR TALKS DOWN 5 PLUS 2

Classified By: Pol M/C Alice Wells for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Russian Transnistria Conflict Negotiator Valeriy Nesterushkin told us Russia is still working on setting a date and agenda for planned "2 plus 1" talks in March between Moldovan President Voronin, Transnistrian leader Smirnov, and President Medvedev, as discussed during Foreign Minister Lavrov's February 23-24 visit. Despite Lavrov's public support for the "5 plus 2," Nesterushkin suggested that Russia was increasingly skeptical that the OSCE format remained effective, but maintained the "2 plus 1" structure was not designed to supplant it. Nesterushkin confirmed Russia was using offers of financial aid and energy assistance to push Smirnov to the negotiating table. He insisted the Russian troop presence did not violate the CFE Treaty or Istanbul Commitments, but allowed that Russia could withdraw its troops if an international troop presence was established. Nesterushkin saw little chance of Transnistria reuniting with Moldova, but described the issuance of Russian passports as a "natural" development, while asserting Russia's right to defend its citizens abroad. Analysts see no chance of a conflict resolution in the near term, citing "Transnistrian obstinacy." End Summary.

-----  
Lavrov visit  
-----

12. (C) Russian Special Negotiator for the Transnistria Conflict Valeriy Nesterushkin told us on March 2 that Transnistria ranked low on Foreign Minister Lavrov's agenda during his February 23-24 trip to Moldova. Nesterushkin instead highlighted the signing of the Humanitarian Cooperation Program 2009-2010, opening of the Russian Center of Science and Culture, talks on the economic situation and improving trade relations, and Moldova's CIS chairmanship as key elements of Lavrov's visit. Insisting Russia was a "well-wishing neutral" observer of the Moldova election process, Nesterushkin stressed that the timing of Lavrov's visit was long-planned and not meant to interfere with the April 5 elections, as Lavrov himself had said during a February 24 press conference. However, Nesterushkin described Russia as a "brand name" that evoked positive connotations in Moldova. Therefore, Voronin wanted to use both Lavrov's visit and the planned "2 plus 1" meeting to show voters that he was able to maintain close contact with Moscow. In an earlier meeting, MFA 2nd CIS Director Viktor Sorokin told us that Russia understood Voronin would remain the power behind any future Moldovan President, and saw this visit as a wise down payment in its bilateral relationship with the next Chisinau administration.

-----  
2 plus 1  
-----

13. (C) Turning to the Transnistria problem, Nesterushkin said Moldovan President Voronin and Transnistrian leader Smirnov had agreed the "2 plus 1" meeting should take place

before the Moldovan elections, but Russia had yet to obtain agreement on a date.

14. (C) Nesterushkin conceded that there was no consensus yet on the agenda of the "2 plus 1" talks. Moldova insisted on discussing its draft legislation package for the resolution of the Transnistria conflict, while Smirnov demanded that the meeting focus on the requirement that companies in Transnistria must first register in Chisinau before being allowed to export -- normally not an issue, Neterushkin allowed, but an "understandable" problem for a conflict region. While Medvedev had convinced both sides to allow experts to discuss trade issues, the upcoming meetings could be "much more successful" if the negotiators received political directives that could only come out of high-level meetings such as the "2 plus 1."

15. (C) Nesterushkin did not shed much further light on Lavrov's February 24 comments that the conflict parties should agree on a "state and legal model" to resolve the conflict, while the "2 plus 1" talks should "help approve basic principles." Nesterushkin clarified that the principle of "equality of the negotiating parties" should not prejudice the sides' standing in other contexts, such as final status. Nesterushkin did not name any other principles -- we suggested territorial integrity, for which Lavrov had reiterated Russia's support at the press conference -- but simply noted that the OSCE had developed principles for the non-military resolution of regional conflicts. He confirmed Russia's desire for a deliverable of the "2 plus 1" talks, saying only that a signed declaration would be ideal, or if not achievable an unsigned statement of positions, or a press

MOSCOW 00000543 002 OF 002

release, with the content depending on the as-yet-unconfirmed agenda.

16. (C) Expounding on Lavrov's February 27 description of the "2 plus 1" talks as "laying the groundwork" for the "5 plus 2," Nesterushkin expressed skepticism that the Transnistria conflict "must" be resolved in the "5 plus 2" format. Instead, he argued, one should use "whatever format produces results." However, the "2 plus 1" talks were not meant to supplant the "5 plus 2" format.

17. (C) In reference to his own meetings with Transnistrian leader Smirnov and Transnistrian "Foreign Minister" Yastrebchak last week, Nesterushkin confirmed Russia was using Smirnov's desire for Russian financial and energy assistance to push Transnistria into talks with Moldova. However, he saw little chance of moving Transnistria toward reuniting with Moldova as long as polls in Transnistria showed popular support for independence.

-----  
Kozak Plan/Troop presence  
-----

18. (C) Nesterushkin defended Russia's continued support for the 2003 Kozak Plan as the basis for a conflict resolution, claiming it was the only plan that had enjoyed the consensus of both conflict parties. In answer to our question, he said the Russian troop presence in Transnistria as upheld in the Kozak Plan could be an issue for negotiations. He conceded that Russia could withdraw its troops once an international troop presence was established, but voiced skepticism that it would be possible to gain concurrence for such a proposal. When pressed that if all mediators agreed jointly to such a plan, the conflict parties might be persuaded come on board, he doubted a mediator "could be agreed upon to present a joint proposal."

19. (C) Nesterushkin repeated the Russian position that the CFE treaty and the 1999 Istanbul Agreement on the Adaptation of the CFE Treaty did not apply to the Russian troop presence in Transnistria. While the troops were "ready to withdraw,"

Russia would not do so as long as the conflict continued. Besides, Nesterushkin maintained, Transnistria considered the Russian presence the "guarantor of stability" and would not let the troops leave.

-----  
Passports  
-----

¶10. (C) Nesterushkin defended the issuance of Russian passports in Transnistria -- with The Moscow Times reporting recently that one quarter of the population in Transnistria has a Russian passport -- as a "natural" development, which did not cause concern in Chisinau, and pointed to the large numbers of dual Moldova-Ukraine passport holders in Transnistria as an example of other instances of foreign passportization. He dismissed the notion of this being a step toward Transnistria's inclusion into the Russian Federation as an "artificial hypothesis," but asserted Russia's right to defend Russian citizens abroad.

-----  
Analysts see stalemate continuing  
-----

¶11. (C) Despite Russia's efforts, analysts do not see the Transnistria conflict being resolved anytime soon. While Sergey Markedonov of the Institute for Political and Military Analysis told us he did not see any side having an interest in resolving the conflict, Artem Malgin (MGIMO) unhesitatingly pointed to Transnistria as the reason for the lack of progress, being "much less cooperative than Moldova." Vitaliy Kulik of the Ukrainian Center for Studies on Civil Society similarly suggested in a guest commentary on [www.politkom.ru](http://www.politkom.ru) that Transnistria was the main obstacle to a resolution, contending Smirnov was holding out for the unlikely Cyprus-style recognition by Russia alone.  
BEYRLE